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**Review of Steve Fuller and Veronika Lipinska
The Proactionary Imperative: A Foundation for
Transhumanism. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014,
£18.99 pbk, (ISBN:9781137433091), 168pp.**

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Review Only

The Proactionary Imperative: A Foundation for Transhumanism, by Steve Fuller and Victoria Lipińska

Matthew David, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Durham University, UK.

Dora Meredith, UK Representative, Business Support and Europe Liaison, Technology Strategy Board of the European Commission.

Fuller and Lipinska claim human potential is shackled by precautionary concerns to avoid harm, placing protection against negative potentials above benefits that might arise from admittedly risky experimentation. ‘The proactionary imperative’ rebalances opportunity over protection.

With technological and scientific advancement presented as core to human evolution, citizens are said to have a ‘right’ to liberate science. The manacles of risk adverse policy making supposedly detriment a population denied the fruits of unknown opportunities. Proponents of the EU funding agenda assert the current emphasis on removing barriers to innovation though challenge-led, interdisciplinary approaches undermines assertions that public research is hampering its own ambition. For Fuller and Lipinska however, the research agenda should be open for everyone to steer though investment of economic and biological capital; regardless of the disparity in the information that the population have at their disposal to enable informed decisions about science. Public policy makers assert the importance of strategic approaches to publicly funded research and innovation that balance current and future interests. At the European level, research funders seek to balance conflicting strategic priorities, national programmes and increasingly private sources with leverage potential. For the proactionary, big governmental claim to ‘know best’ when ‘protecting’ citizens from themselves jars with their faith in knowing, risk taking entrepreneurs. However, such lack of faith does not disprove the value of non-market driven expertise.

Allegedly, left/right is being replaced by up/down. Scientific ‘transfiguration’ (genetic or digital) enthuses technocrats and free-marketeers whilst horrifying communitarians and traditionalists, teasing apart technocratic left elites from communitarian ‘masses’, and right libertarians from conservatives. Augmented ‘Humanity 2.0’ ‘playing god’ sets black sky thinkers (leave nature for the stars) against green earth thinkers (don’t mess with Mother Nature). Science/technology affords new possibilities, challenging existing accommodations. Whether this pressure is new or imperative is unclear. Tension between ‘young’ (‘romantic’) Marx and older ‘scientific’ Marx (2.0), between romantic socialists (Goodwin/Morris) and technocratic Fabians, as between syndicalists and ‘Leninist’ statistes, shows the left was always divided. 19th century Whigs and Tories highlight similar ‘right’ differences. From Saint Simon, Owen and Comte through to Wilson’s ‘white heat of technology’, the class struggle was routinely offset by growth; promises of more weakening calls for redistribution. Marriage/breeding arrangements between blue blooded aristocrats and red blooded new money show how elites synthesised political, economic and genetic variation long before Mendel. The new affordances Fuller and Lipinska highlight are significant as continuities, not just as novelties. Does genetic enhancement, digitalised minds and space colonisation impel political re-orientation? Mass production tempered left demands, even as vaccines and improved agriculture rebuffed right Malthusians. Technocratic ‘up’ thinking isn’t new. If Fuller and Lipinska are correct

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3 technocratic 'more' really must dispense with scarcity. The internet does make some things less
4 scarce (i.e music). As Maxwell's demon (an agent overcoming entropy and suspending the second
5 law of thermodynamics), 3D printers downloading medicine, food and houses to all, would abolish
6 left-right divisions. Politics would become a debate over human transfiguration. This possible future
7 has yet to arise. Most 'transhumanists' believe free markets already create a world where political
8 distribution is redundant. Fuller and Lipinska disagree. They reject Marx's 'utopian' 'slur' against
9 Saint Simon (for believed class struggle was passé after science and industry). Today's
10 'transhumanists' imply corporations/markets are sufficient to recreate earth in heaven. The authors
11 rightly temper techno-libertarian 'up-wing' scenarios with equity and justice mechanisms for a
12 'proactionary left'. As such they reposition left politics from welfarist 'protectionism' to an equal
13 'right to enhance'.

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17 Today's science and technology are both 'game changer' and yet continuation of Western scientific
18 and Christian traditions. Today we 'play god' metaphorically and literally. As Unitarian Christians the
19 authors reject the science/religion divide. Atheism just avoids cosmic disappointment. Humans
20 should embrace cosmic uniqueness, comprehending nature and remaking it (becoming god). 'Don't
21 play god' as heuristic for 'nature knows best' is rejected. If some knowledge is good and practical
22 (planned parenting), why not embrace 'good' eugenics? Yet 'playing god' takes many forms. Jesus'
23 'world historical significance' is said to be his 'transfiguration' from man into the divine, an invitation
24 for all humans to become god, not just pupils or robots. 'Transhumanists' seek 'the mind of god' (via
25 science) and remake earth in heaven (via technology) as 'the new protestants'. Catholicism, like
26 today's scientific 'orthodoxy' (including 'Darwinism') hold back individual transfiguration (the
27 supposed precautionary protectionism of EU science discussed above being the paradigmatic fusion
28 of Catholicism and Darwinian Orthodoxy - allegedly).

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32 Yet, within Western Christianity there are many ways of being god. Deism – God sets the clockwork
33 waiting for Newton to reveal it. Clientalism – God regulates the market, contracting Moses, Jesus, JS
34 Mill etc. to run franchises delivering outcomes. Ecologism – God lives in nature and humans steward
35 Gaia or get punished – Vis Eden. Expressionism – Born a cosmic/evolutionary accident humans can
36 (must), after the 'miracle' of self-consciousness, master existence and become god. Given options,
37 none is 'imperative'. The idea that all humans can become god-like in the sense of bodily
38 transcendence within 'this' life is rather heretical. The authors' 'Expressionism' is secular Christian
39 teleology for a scientific age (zeitgeist after geist). If other gods reflect mercantilism, tribal and
40 feudal society, Fuller and Lipinska don't explain their religion sociologically. They suggest, rightly
41 enough, a particular (secularised) religious outlook drives today's proactionaries. Whether this
42 secular protestant (largely US led) drive to escape the flesh and realise heaven by hard/solitary
43 (scientific and technical) work is itself right/desirable, is another matter. They insert equity into a
44 'transhumanist' heaven otherwise mirroring a Californian dot.com, a continued but revised left
45 politics (2.0) combining 'black sky thinking' with elements of Christian and Social Democratic values.

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51 Our biological evolution enabled 'miraculous' consciousness, rational agency, and a special moral
52 status: giving humans the right and obligation to enhance and promote themselves. Rejecting
53 oppressive and murderous forms of eugenics may allow for liberating eugenic promotion of positive
54 characteristics but the distinction remains contested. The authors reject market versions of
55 'transhumanism's' 'proactionary' ethos, seeking new forms of positive and collective
56 action/regulation putting power to improve into the hands of groups with particular genes. Their
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concept of ‘hedgenomics’ – the pooling of resources by groups with shared genetic conditions— drawing a parallel with the very market culture funds they seek to inhibit – may or may not work. Similarly extending intellectual property over the human genome as a defence against private ownership creates paradoxes. Abolishing the invention/discovery distinction is consistent with ‘transhumanist’ logic. However, if such ‘inventions’ are ‘held’ collectively (passing directly into the public domain) to avoid corporate enclosure, why should they be deemed intellectual property in the first place? Nonetheless, as markets and laboratories are not enough to ensure fair access to future opportunities, the attempt to reimagine justice and equity in a future where diversity proliferates is a valuable undertaking.

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